



February 23, 2022

Senator Catherine A. Osten, Co-Chair
Representative Toni E. Walker, Co-Chair
Senator Craig Miner, Ranking Member
Representative Mike France, Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee

Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building
210 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairwoman Osten, Chairwoman Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France and
Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Rebecca Ruitto, I am a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT) and I am the Chair for the Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (CTAMFT). I am a resident of Portland and own a private mental health practice in West Hartford. I am writing in support of the Governor's budget proposal to include funding for student loan reimbursement for mental health providers, as outlined in HB 5037.

CTAMFT currently represents over 1,500 licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) through-out Connecticut. Marriage and Family Therapists are employed in various clinical settings throughout the state, serving diverse mental health needs via: private outpatient treatment; community based and outreach programs; in-home services; school-based services; and agency inpatient and outpatient care, among others.

Student loan reimbursement programs would be immensely impactful to the overall mental health care needs of Connecticut and its residents in a multitude of ways. It will provide incentives and a means for new mental health care professionals to enter into the extremely understaffed mental health field. Many mental health agencies throughout the state have extensive waitlists for routine and urgent mental health care needs as a result of not having enough staff to sufficiently treat the mental health needs of all the Connecticut residents.

The mental health care workforce is a person-centered field that requires expertly trained professionals. The education and career investment that are required to become and remain a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Connecticut are expensive and time consuming. Many potential professionals are choosing not to enter the mental health field as a result of these burdens, despite their passion to serve their communities. Loan reimbursement programs incentivize more individuals to enter the Marriage and Family Therapy field.

Marriage and Family Therapists are currently included in several loan reimbursement programs federally. The Federal Loan Repayment Program by the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) includes MFTs and provides student loan repayment to LMFTs and other healthcare professionals in exchange for a commitment to provide services at NHSC-approved sites in underserved urban and rural communities. Additionally, MFTs are included in the Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recover Loan Repayment Program (STAR LRP), which provides support for those working directly with individuals recovering from substance use disorders.

Locally, Connecticut has the established SLRP (CSLRP), which is a federal-state partnership that assists states in addressing the health professional shortages that cause disparities in access to healthcare. However, until the Governor's proposal no funding has been allocated to this program for mental health professionals, diverting those interested back to the federal NHSC loan program. Funding to support existing loan reimbursement programs such as the CSLRP will increase loan reimbursement opportunities spurring more individuals to enter the mental health field. It is our belief that the more residents that receive mental health care, the better it is for our state as a whole.

I urge you to provide funding for loan reimbursement programs for mental health professionals, including MFTs, incentivizing more mental health professionals to enter the workforce without undue financial hardships, thus increasing the number of providers available to treat our Connecticut residents.

Thank you for your time on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Ruitto, LMFT

Rebecca Ruitto, LMFT
Chair, CTAMFT